

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE DISTRICT OF SOUTH
CAROLINA, FLORENCE DIVISION

Eric A. Wigfall, Jr. v. Sheriff Ritchee

Wigfall · No. 4:26-cv-00008-RMG · Decided February 24, 2026

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the District of South Carolina adopted the magistrate judge’s recommendation and dismissed Eric A. Wigfall, Jr.’s 28 U.S.C. § 2241 habeas petition without prejudice under the Younger abstention doctrine. The court also denied a certificate of appealability and did not require the respondent to file a return.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the District of South Carolina, Florence Division
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Richard Mark Gergel
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the District of South Carolina, Florence Division
DECIDED	February 24, 2026
DOCKET	4:26-cv-00008-RMG
DISPOSITION	dismissed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Petitioner sought federal habeas relief under 28 U.S.C. § 2241 while detained pending trial in state criminal proceedings. The matter was referred to a magistrate judge, who recommended summary dismissal under Younger abstention without requiring a response from the respondent. After petitioner objected, the district court adopted the Report and Recommendation and dismissed the petition without prejudice.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	The district court makes a de novo determination of portions of a magistrate judge's report and recommendation to which specific objections are made, and may accept, reject, or modify the recommendation. In the absence of specific objections, the court reviews the record for clear error. Pro se pleadings are liberally construed, but liberal construction does not permit the court to disregard a failure to allege facts supporting a viable federal claim.

TOPICS

federal habeas corpus

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PRACTICE AREAS

federal habeas corpus

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civil procedure

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the district court should adopt the magistrate judge's Report and Recommendation when petitioner did not make specific objections.
2. Whether Younger abstention required dismissal of the petitioner's § 2241 habeas petition challenging ongoing state criminal proceedings.
3. Whether petitioner was entitled to a certificate of appealability.

HOLDINGS

1. Because petitioner did not specifically object to any portion of the Report and Recommendation, the district court was required at most to review the record for clear error and properly adopted the recommendation.
2. Younger abstention applies because petitioner was involved in ongoing state criminal proceedings, those proceedings implicated important state interests, and petitioner had an adequate opportunity to raise his federal claims in the state proceedings.
3. A certificate of appealability was denied because petitioner did not make the required substantial showing of the denial of a constitutional right.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“Nevertheless, the Court finds that the Magistrate Judge correctly determined that applying Younger abstention is appropriate here because (1) Petitioner is involved in ongoing state criminal proceedings, (2) those proceedings implicate important state interests, and (3) Petitioner has an adequate opportunity to raise his federal claims in the state proceedings.” (at 3)

“For the foregoing reasons, the Court ADOPTS the R&R (Dkt. No. 8) as the Order of the Court, DISMISSES Petitioner’s habeas petition (Dkt. No. 1) without prejudice and without requiring Respondent to file a return, and DENIES a certificate of appealability.” (at 4)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Petitioner was a state detainee awaiting trial on four criminal charges. He filed a petition under 28 U.S.C. § 2241 asking the federal court to investigate the matters underlying his detention and release him from the detention center. The court found that ongoing state criminal proceedings implicated important state interests and provided petitioner an adequate opportunity to raise his federal claims.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Eric A. Wigfall, Jr., proceeding pro se, filed a § 2241 petition seeking investigation of his circumstances and release from detention. The magistrate judge recommended dismissal based on Younger abstention. The district court reviewed the recommendation, found no specific objection requiring de novo review, independently determined that Younger abstention applied, adopted the recommendation, dismissed without prejudice, and denied a certificate of appealability.

DISPOSITION

dismissed

CASES CITED

- Younger v. Harris, 401 U.S. 37 (1971)
- Mathews v. Weber, 423 U.S. 261, 270-71 (1976)
- Diamond v. Colonial Life & Accident Ins. Co., 416 F.3d 310, 315 (4th Cir. 2005)
- Cruz v. Beto, 405 U.S. 319, 322 (1972)
- Haines v. Kerner, 404 U.S. 519, 520-21 (1972)
- Weller v. Dep't of Soc. Servs., 901 F.2d 387, 391 (4th Cir. 1990)
- Robinson v. Thomas, 855 F.3d 278, 285 (4th Cir. 2017)
- Robinson v. Thomas, 855 F.3d 278, 286 (4th Cir. 2017)
- Miller-El v. Cockrell, 537 U.S. 322, 336 (2003)
- Slack v. McDaniel, 529 U.S. 473, 484 (2000)
- Rose v. Lee, 252 F.3d 676, 683 (4th Cir. 2001)

OPINION

Wigfall

PER CURIAM.

IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT

DISTRICT OF SOUTH CAROLINA

FLORENCE DIVISION

Eric A. Wigfall, Jr., Case No. 4:26-cv-00008-RMG Petitioner, v.

ORDER

Sheriff Ritchee, Respondent. This matter is before the Court upon the Report and Recommendation (“R&R”) of the Magistrate Judge, recommending that the Court dismiss Petitioner’s petition for writ of habeas corpus, filed pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 2241, without prejudice and without requiring Respondent to file a return. (Dkt. No. 8). Petitioner has filed an objection to the R&R. (Dkt. No. 10). For the reasons set forth below, the Court adopts the R&R as the Order of the Court and dismisses Petitioner’s habeas petition without prejudice and without

requiring Respondent to file a return. I. Background Petitioner, proceeding pro se, is a state detainee awaiting trial on four criminal charges. (Dkt. No. 8, at 2). He filed a petition for writ of habeas corpus relief pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 2241 requesting that the Court “investigate these matters” and “release [him] from the detention center.” (Dkt. No. 1, at 7). The Magistrate Judge recommended summarily dismissing Petitioner’s § 2241 petition based on the *Younger*¹ abstention doctrine. (Dkt. No. 8, at 3-4). Petitioner timely objected to the R&R. (Dkt. No. 10). This matter is ripe for disposition. 1 *Younger v. Harris*, 401 U.S. 37 (1971). 1 II. Legal Standard A. Magistrate’s Report and Recommendation The Magistrate Judge makes only a recommendation to this Court. The recommendation has no presumptive weight, and the responsibility for making a final determination remains with this Court. See *Mathews v. Weber*, 423 U.S. 261, 270-71 (1976). This Court is charged with making a de novo determination of those portions of the R&R to which specific objections are made. See 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1). Additionally, the Court may “accept, reject, or modify, in whole or in part, the findings or recommendations made by the magistrate judge.” *Id.* Where the petitioner fails to timely file any specific objections, “a district court need not conduct a de novo review, but instead must only satisfy itself that there is no clear error on the face of the record in order to accept the recommendation.” *Diamond v. Colonial Life & Accident Ins. Co.*, 416 F.3d 310, 315 (4th Cir. 2005) (citation and punctuation omitted). B. Pro Se Pleadings This Court liberally construes complaints filed by pro se litigants to allow the development of a potentially meritorious case. See *Cruz v. Beto*, 405 U.S. 319, 322 (1972); *Haines v. Kerner*, 404 U.S. 519, 520-21 (1972). The requirement of liberal construction does not mean that the Court can ignore a clear failure in the pleadings to allege facts which set forth a viable federal claim, nor can the Court assume the existence of a genuine issue of material fact where none exists. See *Weller v. Dep’t of Soc. Servs.*, 901 F.2d 387, 391 (4th Cir. 1990) (citation omitted). III. Discussion As an initial matter, the Court notes that Petitioner does not appear to specifically object to any portion of the R&R. See *Diamond*, 416 F.3d at 315 (recognizing that in the absence of a specific objection, the district court need only review the record for clear error). See also Fed. R. 2 Civ. P. 72(b)(2) (requiring a party objecting to a Magistrate Judge’s recommendation to file “specific written objections to the proposed findings and recommendations”). Nevertheless, the Court finds that the Magistrate Judge correctly determined that applying *Younger* abstention is appropriate here because (1) Petitioner is involved in ongoing state criminal proceedings, (2) those proceedings implicate important state interests, and (3) Petitioner has an adequate opportunity to raise his federal claims in the state proceedings. See generally *Robinson v. Thomas*, 855 F.3d 278, 285 (4th Cir. 2017) (setting forth the three *Younger* criteria in the context of a § 2241 petition) (citation omitted). Moreover, Petitioner has not made a showing of “extraordinary circumstances” justifying federal interference with the state proceedings. See *id.* at 286 (“A federal court may disregard *Younger*’s mandate to abstain from interfering with ongoing state proceedings only where ‘extraordinary circumstances’ exist that present the possibility of irreparable harm.”) (citation omitted). Therefore, the Magistrate Judge correctly determined that Petitioner’s § 2241

petition should be dismissed. IV. Certificate of Appealability The governing law provides that: (c) (2) A certificate of appealability may issue . . . only if the applicant has made a substantial showing of the denial of a constitutional right. (c)(3) The certificate of appealability . . . shall indicate which specific issue or issues satisfy the showing required by paragraph (2). 28 U.S.C. § 2253(c). A petitioner satisfies the standard by demonstrating that reasonable jurists would find this Court's assessment of his constitutional claims debatable or wrong and that any dispositive procedural ruling by the district court is likewise debatable. See *Miller-El v. Cockrell*, 537 U.S. 322, 336 (2003) (citation omitted); *Slack v. McDaniel*, 529 U.S. 473, 484 (2000); *Rose v. Lee*, 252 F.3d 676, 683 (4th Cir. 2001) (citation omitted). In this case, the legal standard for the issuance of a certificate of appealability has not been met. Therefore, a certificate of appealability is denied. V. Conclusion For the foregoing reasons, the Court ADOPTS the R&R (Dkt. No. 8) as the Order of the Court, DISMISSES Petitioner's habeas petition (Dkt. No. 1) without prejudice and without requiring Respondent to file a return, and DENIES a certificate of appealability. AND IT IS SO ORDERED. s/ Richard Mark Gergel Richard Mark Gergel United States District Judge February 24, 2026 Charleston, South Carolina 4